PSALM 1:1-3:
A Brief Comparison between One Form of Synagogue Chant and Haïk-Vantoura's Reconstructed Biblical Chant

In a remarkable article in the *Journal of Jewish Music and Liturgy*, Macy Nulman discusses what may be known about the "accents of the Three Books" (**ta`amei EMeT**) from traditional sources.[1] His tables describing the names, forms and tonal functions of the **te`amim** eerily mirror the tables of Suzanne Haïk-Vantoura[2] describing the same elements. On the one hand, Nulman infers the tonal forms and functions of the **te`amim** vis-à-vis the forms and names of the signs, generally without reference to any living musical practice.[3] On the other hand, Haïk-Vantoura inferred the tonal forms and functions of the **te`amim** vis-à-vis the forms of the signs and their relationship to each other and the verbal syntax, originally without reference to the names of the signs. The astonishingly close matches in many (though by no means all) cases between Nulman's inferences and Haïk-Vantoura's are worth investigating of itself.

For the purposes of this paper, I will limit myself to how Nulman attempts to illustrate how the **ta`amei EMeT** originally functioned musically.[4] For his sample Psalm text, he reprints Psalm 1 from a liturgical edition of the Psalms in Hebrew.[5] For a melodic rendition of the first three verses, he transcribes a traditional Oriental-Sephardic melody as performed by the late cantor Gabriel Abraham Shrem.[6] Yet in his article, there is no table showing how each **ta`am** is rendered distinctly in the melody, as one commonly finds in discussions of the synagogal cantillation of the accents of the 21 Books.[7] A comparison of the melodic rendition of Psalm 1 by Shrem with the **te`amim** attached to the words given with his rendition shows that there *is* in fact no such exact rendition of the signs by the melody. The signs act as mere *markers* for the stopping points of the melody. Even in those few cases where there is some correspondence

---

[1] Macy Nulman, "Understanding Ta`amei EmeT", in *Journal of Jewish Music and Liturgy*, 1988-1989 / 5749-5750, Volume XI, pp. 35-52. The article is based on a talk sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Greater Fort Lauderdale, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida.

[2] See her book *The Music of the Bible Revealed* (BIBAL Press/King David's Harp, Inc., 1991), pp. 96-105. Another table or "verification ruler" giving these names is given at the end of her accompanied scores*: La musique de la Bible révélée, Premier Recueil* (Editions Choudens, 1978) and *Second Recueil* (1979). The author derived the names themselves from a list collated by Hebrew grammarian Meyer Lambert in France.

[3] One exception is Nulman's inference regarding the character of **silluq**, which he describes as "expressed first by a rising tone followed by a lowering of the tone" (p. 43). Nothing in the grapheme or the name suggests this. However, **silluq** is often interpreted in a similar way in the synagogue chants of the 21 Books.

[4] In passing, Nulman presents the reader with a contradiction. He infers the general melodic nature of nearly all of the "conjunctives" (p. 44), yet he goes on to say that they have no melodic function (p. 45)! Whereas his citation of the *Diqduqei ha-Te`amim* by the Masorete Aharon ben Asher (fl. 930 AD) actually illustrates how they may do so: "four accents create (bring out) a melody and eight accents make it sweet" (p. 45). In the Haïk-Vantoura Psalms, *four* "disjunctive and conjunctive accents" taken together (as in many a Psalm title) indeed suffice to create a melody (i.e., a complete melodic phrase), and *eight* taken together (as in many a verse or part of a verse) may make it "sweet" indeed!

[5] Saleh J. Mansour, *Sefer Tehillim* (Jerusalem, 1941).

[6] Cantor Shrem performed at the Syrian Congregation B'nat Yosef, Brooklyn, New York, and was instructor in Oriental-Sephardic chant at the Philip and Sarah Belz School of Jewish Music at Yeshiva University. (The School, in conjunction with the Cantorial Council of America, publishes the *Journal of Jewish Music and Liturgy*.)

[7] Such a table is found for the Sephardic chant of the Torah on p. 25 of the same Volume of the *Journal* (Harvey Spitzer, "Samuel Naumbourg's Introduction to his "Agudath Schirim (Paris 1874): Translated from the French", in *op. cit.*, pp. 17-34).

between melodic rendition and written form, the correspondence lacks perfect consistency.

As other published sources admit, the Synagogue itself confesses that it has not preserved the original method of psalmody in practice, even as the various communities each argue for the age and accurate preservation of its own tradition of the cantillation of the 21 Books. Yet since *none* of these traditions explain most of the physical features of the **te`amim** or their relationships with each other and the verbal text, and since *all* of these traditions differ from each other, it can hardly be said in all reasonableness that the cantillation of the 21 Books was preserved in practice by the Synagogue either.

Haïk-Vantoura deciphered the **ta`amei EMeT** after deciphering the much more complicated system of **ta`amei khaf-alef** (the "accents of the 21 Books"). A brief comparison between her reconstructed melody for Psalm 1:1-3 and the Oriental-Sephardic melody for the same verses as published by Nulman will give to the readers of BIBAL.net a useful contrast.

Characteristics of the Hebrew Source Texts

First, it should be noted that Nulman starts with a Hebrew text that differs substantially (with regard to the **te`amim** and associated features) from the text used by Haïk-Vantoura.[8] In the copy of Nulman's source text (which I provide below), I have circled those few **te`amim** (and in one case, a hyphen or **maqqef**) which are missing from Haïk-Vantoura's source text. Far more abundant are the examples of **te`amim** which are missing from or have been moved in Nulman's source text; these I have written in. Nearly all of the latter examples concern the **ta`am** which the Masoretes distinguished as **tsinnorit**.[9] This "helping accent", found at the beginning or in the middle of the word, was often omitted by the scribes, apparently due to ignorance as to its importance. It is ignored entirely in Shrem's psalmody. Only its counterpart at the end of the word, **tsinnor**,[10] is taken into account by the latter, and that without perfect consistency.

Characteristics of the Oriental-Sephardic Chant

For the sake of comparison, I have provided scores of Psalm 1:1-3, the first giving the synagogue chant as transcribed by Nulman, the second giving the reconstructed Temple chant as based on the **te`amim** in the Letteris Edition and as transcribed by Haïk-Vantoura.

---

[8] Haïk-Vantoura started with the text found in the (Meir ha-Levi) Letteris Edition, originally published by the British and Foreign Bible Society and in its day the basis of a worldwide publishing phenomenon (often despite its Christian associations).

[9] Nulman duly follows this nomenclature (*ibid.*, p. 44). Whereas Haïk-Vantoura takes it as simply **tsinnor** in another guise (see next footnote).

[10] Nulman, citing Wickes, infers correctly that **tsinnorit** must have been a musical variant of **tsinnor** (pp. 44, 50). Under Haïk-Vantoura's analysis, the two signs show themselves to have the same *fundamental* musical meaning, yet they typically *resolve* differently vis-à-vis the following syllable and its **ta`am** (if any).

Some features of the synagogue chant stand out upon examination:

- The *mode* or musical scale type used is a "gapped" version of the *harmonic minor* (the 6th degree, the equivalent of B flat, being missing).
- The mode is *plagal* rather than *authentic*: that is, rather than placing its *finalis*[11] at the bottom of the octave (as in an authentic mode), it places that note on the 4th degree of the octave (as in a plagal mode).
- The melody generally stays within a *pentachord*, between the 1st and the 5th degrees (D to A). Rarely, it descends briefly to the bottom of the octave (twice in verse 3).
- Despite the presence of a *finalis*, there is virtually no *tonal syntax* (phrase structure based on harmonic relationships between tones). The *finalis* does not assert itself as a *tonic* (a strong *center of attraction* for the other degrees of the mode) in the way it does in tonal music (such as several extant pieces of ancient Greek music, modern Western music, and Haïk-Vantoura's reconstructed biblical cantillation as well). Nor do it or other degrees or combinations of degrees strongly associate themselves with particular kinds of *melodic-verbal cadences* (again as is so characteristic of tonal music).
- The *form* of the melody itself is virtually *chaotic*. With the normal laws of tonal syntax set aside, the singer's voice rises and falls at his ease, lightly marking some cadences with a return to the *finalis* and heavily marking others with intense *melismas*[12], yet without building a *tonal hierarchy* that brings out the syntax and meaning of the words in any coherent way. Thus the expression given by the melody is *vague* at best -- even "uninspired" in the artistic if not the spiritual sense.
- The synagogue chant (according to Rabbinic proscription and long tradition) is meant to be sung *without accompaniment*. This may be a major reason why its *harmonic implications* are so weak. Were an *adequate accompaniment* required in addition to a strong sense of *compositional propriety*, and not just a "pleasant voice", the Oriental-Sephardic tradition sampled here may have become and remained more musically worthwhile in its own right.

This sort of chant is what ethnomusicologist Israel Adler had in mind when he distinguished the "primitive chant" of the oldest synagogue communities from the later "tropes" that most students of Jewish music think of when they perform, listen to or examine synagogue chant. However emotively performed or carefully preserved, the fact remains that such music is hardly "music worthy of the name" (in Haïk-Vantoura's judgment as a classical composer). It alternates (in Jewish musicologist Eric Werner's words) between *logogenic* and *pathogenic* extremes without ever becoming either one. It is as if it is always searching for that happy combination of melody and words that is *melogenic* music and never finding it.[13]

---

[11] The note that ends every verse by default, the "final" note.
[12] Long ornaments or groups of notes sung on one syllable.
[13] *Logogenic* (*logos*-born or "word-born") music is all but completely dominated by the words; *pathogenic* (*pathos*-born or "passion-born") music, all but completely dominated by melodic ornaments. These are the musical styles of primitive and

Characteristics of the Reconstructed Biblical Chant

How very different is the *down-to-earth*, yet paradoxically *ethereal* chant reconstructed by Haïk-Vantoura! Among its outstanding characteristics are these:

- The *mode* or musical scale type used is also a version of the *harmonic minor*. It is "gapped", but in a different sense: the sublinear **te`amim** (representing the *fundamental degrees* of the mode) replace two signs representing the lowest two degrees of the octave with one sign. The basic mode is thus based on only seven degrees, not eight.
- The mode is *neither plagal nor authentic*. This dual modal construction, most famous in Greek and medieval European music and widely used elsewhere, may well have originated in Mesopotamia, and perhaps in Babylon itself. Whereas the biblical modality places its *finalis* on the *third* degree of the octave (in the 21 Books) or on the *second* degree of the heptachord (in the 3 Books).
- The melody of the Psalm ranges over a *full octave*, thanks in part to the superlinear **te`amim**.
- The *finalis* (marked by the **ta`am** named **silluq**[14]) is the *center of attraction* (*tonic* degree) at the heart of the *tonal syntax* (phrase structure based on harmonic relationships between tones). It and other degrees or combinations of degrees strongly associate themselves with particular kinds of *melodic-verbal cadences* (as is characteristic of tonal, *melogenic* music).
- The *form* of the melody itself is *highly disciplined*. The *finalis* (**silluq**), the other cadential signs (**`oleh weyored**, **atnah**, **tsinnor**, etc.) and the other signs (both the sublinear *degrees* of the mode and the simple, superlinear *melismas*) build a *strict tonal and punctuational hierarchy* that brings out the syntax and meaning of the words in a coherent and expressive way.
- The melody obviously demands *adequate accompaniment* in order to bring out its full *harmonic implications*. As Haïk-Vantoura notes, her reconstructed psalmody must by no means be sung without harp, lute or guitar accompaniment. This is consistent with biblical and other historical testimony: plucked string instruments accompanied ancient psalmody *by definition*.

This sort of chant is most emphatically *melogenic*: based on a rigorous *gestalt* of melodic and verbal syntaxes.[15] It is decidedly not the work of amateurs,

---

folk cultures and their amateur musicians. *Melogenic* (*melos*-born) music is characterized by the *integration* of melodic and verbal syntaxes: the *melos*. It is the music of high culture and of professional musicians. (Synagogue chant may be a special case precisely because of its memories of professional music, or because it has attached itself arbitrarily to a professional notation.)

[14] **Ga`ya** or **meteg** is merely **silluq** in another guise under Haïk-Vantoura's key.

[15] As with ancient Greek music, one of the linkages in the *melos* that is biblical chant is *rhythm*. There are others, which are described at some length in Suzanne Haïk-Vantoura, *Message biblique intégrale* (Paris: Fondation Roi David, 1992).

nor is it enough for one to have a "pleasant voice" in order to perform it properly. It is a *delicate art*!

The MIDI Sound File

Using the *Finale 98d*[16] music score writing program, I have created a MIDI file of the Oriental-Sephardic synagogue chant for Psalm 1:1-3, followed by Haïk-Vantoura's transcription and arrangement of the same verses as based on her decipherment of the **te`amim**.

Even given the limitations of the MIDI format (in terms of musical timbre, temperament, rhythm and dynamics), and of my present ability to work within it, the non-melogenic nature of the Oriental-Sephardic chant will hopefully be apparent.[17] The format likewise takes more than a little of the required dynamic expression out of Haïk-Vantoura's transcription; however, the highly tonal and melogenic nature of the reconstructed psalmody should likewise be evident.

John Henry Wheeler
KING DAVID'S HARP, INC.
2337 South Blvd., #B
Houston, TX. 77098-5226 USA
kdhinc@hotmail.com
Version 1.0 / 4/28/04 9:52:16 PM

[16] Created by Coda Music Software, Inc.
[17] One limitation is that it is almost impossible for me to figure out what tempo is appropriate for the synagogue chant. Modern Western notation is handicapped when dealing with Eastern and Oriental music in its more florid forms. I have arbitrarily chosen 90 beats per minute, the value given for Haïk-Vantoura's rendition. For my tastes, however, this tempo makes the synagogue chant perhaps too slow and Haïk-Vantoura's chant somewhat too fast.

א אַשְׁרֵי הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא הָלַךְ בַּעֲצַת
רְשָׁעִים וּבְדֶרֶךְ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמָד
וּבְמוֹשַׁב לֵצִים לֹא יָשָׁב׃ ב כִּי אִם־
בְּתוֹרַת יְהוָה חֶפְצוֹ וּבְתוֹרָתוֹ יֶהְגֶּה
יוֹמָם וָלָיְלָה׃ ג וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ שָׁתוּל
עַל־פַּלְגֵי מָיִם אֲשֶׁר פִּרְיוֹ יִתֵּן בְּעִתּוֹ
וְעָלֵהוּ לֹא יִבּוֹל וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה
יַצְלִיחַ׃ ד לֹא־כֵן הָרְשָׁעִים כִּי אִם־כַּמֹּץ
אֲשֶׁר־תִּדְּפֶנּוּ רוּחַ׃ ה עַל־כֵּן לֹא־יָקֻמוּ
רְשָׁעִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט וְחַטָּאִים בַּעֲדַת
צַדִּיקִים׃ ו כִּי־יוֹדֵעַ יְהוָה דֶּרֶךְ
צַדִּיקִים וְדֶרֶךְ רְשָׁעִים תֹּאבֵד׃

Psalm 1
(*Sefer Tehillim*, Mansour, Saleh J.)

1. אַשְׁרֵי הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא הָלַךְ
Ash-re ho-ish a-sher lo ho-lach
בַּעֲצַת רְשָׁעִים וּבְדֶרֶךְ חַטָּאִים
ba-a-tzat r' sha-im u-v'-de-rech cha-ta-im
לֹא עָמַד וּבְמוֹשַׁב לֵצִים לֹא יָשָׁב׃
lo-o-mad uv-mo-shav le-tzim lo ya-shav
2. כִּי אִם בְּתוֹרַת יְהוָה חֶפְצוֹ וּבְתוֹרָתוֹ
Ki im b'-to-rat a-do-shem chef-tzo u-v'
יֶהְגֶּה יוֹמָם וָלָיְלָה׃
to-ra-to ye-ge Yo-mam va-lai-la
3. וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ שָׁתוּל עַל־פַּלְגֵי מָיִם
v' ha ya-k'-etz sha-tul al pal-ge ma-yim
אֲשֶׁר פִּרְיוֹ יִתֵּן בְּעִתּוֹ
a-sher pir yo yi-ten b'-i-to
וְעָלֵהוּ לֹא יִבּוֹל וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה
v'-a-le-hu lo-yi bol v'-chol a-sher ya-a-
יַצְלִיחַ׃
se-Yatz-li-ach

Example 2: (G. Shrem, transcribed by M.N.)[7]

א 2 לַמְנַצֵּחַ מַשְׂכִּיל לְדָוִד׃ בְּבוֹא ו הוּאִ֣ הָאֲרִמִ֣י וַיִּגֶּד לְשָׁא֑וּל
3 וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ בֶּאֱדֹ֣ום אֲלִבִּ֣ית אֲחִימֶ֑לֶךְ׃ מַדּ֥וּעַ תִּתְהַלֶּל
4 בֶּרָעָה הַגִּבֹּ֣ור חֶ֣סֶד אֵ֑ל כָּל־הַיֹּ֣ום׃ הַוֹּ֥ות תַּחְשֹׁ֖ב לְשֹׁונֶ֣ךָ
כְּתַ֣עַר מְלֻטָּ֑שׁ עֹשֵׂ֥ה רְמִיָּֽה׃ אָהַ֥בְתָּ רַ֗ע מִטּ֥וֹב שֶׁ֝֗קֶר ו ה
6 מְדַבֵּ֣ר צֶ֑דֶק סֶֽלָה׃ אָהַ֥בְתָּ כָל־דִּבְרֵי־בָ֑לַע לְשֹׁ֖ון מִרְמָֽה׃
7 גַּם־אֵ֤ל יִתֹּ֣צְךָ ׀ לָ֗נֶצַח יַחֲתְךָ֥ וְיִסָּחֲךָ֗ מֵאֹ֫הֶל֥ וְשֶׁרֶשְׁךָ֥ מֵאֶ֗רֶץ
8 חַיִּ֑ים סֶֽלָה׃ וְיִרְא֣וּ צַדִּיקִ֣ים וְ֭יִירָאוּ וְעָלָ֣יו יִשְׂחֲק֑וּ׃ הִנֵּ֤ה
9 הַ֤גֶּ֨בֶר ׀ לֹא־יָשִׂ֣ים אֱלֹהִ֣ים מָעֻזֹּ֑ו וַיִּבְטַ֤ח בְּרֹ֖ב עָשְׁרֹ֣ו
בְּהַוָּתֹֽו׃ וַאֲנִ֗י כְּ֭זַיִת רַעֲנָ֣ן בְּבֵ֣ית אֱלֹהִ֑ים בָּטַ֖חְתִּי בְּחֶ֣סֶד
אֱלֹהִ֥ים עֹולָ֗ם וָעֶֽד׃ אֹודְךָ֥ לְעֹולָ֗ם כִּ֣י עָשִׂ֑יתָ וַאֲקַוֶּ֥ה שִׁמְךָ֗ 11
כִּ֖י טֹ֣וב נֶ֑גֶד חֲסִידֶֽיךָ׃

תהלים א

Psaume 1

Psalm 1

ACCOMPAGNEMENT – ACCOMPANIMENT
pour harpe celtique (ou guitare) – for celtic harp (or guitar)

(a) Voir note page 1. / See footnote page 1.

(2.) Mais qui dans la loi de l'Eternel (trouve) son plaisir, et dans cette loi médite jour
2d Solo But who in the law of the Lord (takes) pleasure, and on this Law he meditates day
ki im-be-to-rat A-do-nay hef-tso ouv-to-ra-to yéh Gé yo-
et nuit ! (3.) Il sera comme un arbre planté auprès des cours d'eau, qui
and night ! 1er Solo He will be as a tree planted near streams of water, who
cresc.
dim.
mam va-lay-la ve-ha-ya ke-'éts scha-toul 'al-pal-gê (a) ma-yim a-
cresc.
dim.
/ son fruit / donne en sa saison et dont les feuilles ne se flétrissent pas : tout ce qu'il
his fruit does give in season and whose leaves do not wither : all that he
schér pir-yo yi-Tén be-'i-To ve-'a-lé-hou lo yi-bol ve-khol a-schér
entreprendra réussira.
does will prosper.
(4.) Il n'en est pas ainsi des méchants, qui sont comme le chaume
2d Solo Not so the wicked, who are like chaff
ya-'a-çé yats-li-ah lo khén har-scha-'im ki im-ka-Mots
que pourchasse le vent ! (5.) C'est pourquoi n'ont pas le dessus / les méchants dans le jugement,
blown by the wind ! Therefore do not stand / the wicked / in judgement.
poco
1er Solo
a-schér-TiD-fé-Nou rou-ah 'al-kén lo-ya-kou-mou re-scha-'im ba-Misch-pat
poco

(a) Voir note page 1. / See footnote page 1.